

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 AID-05 COME-00 EB-08 FRB-03 TRSE-00
XMB-02 OPIC-03 LAB-04 SIL-01 OMB-01 EA-10 IO-13
/109 W

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R 111446Z JAN 78
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4101
INFO AMCONSUL BORDEAUX
AMCONSUL LYON
AMCONSUL MARSEILLE
AMCONSUL NICE
AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, FR
SUBJECT: BARRE PRESENTS THE GOVERNMENT'S PROGRAM

SUMMARY. WITH HIS PRESENTATION OF THE GOVERNMENT'S ACTION OBJECTIVES AT BLOIS ON JANUARY 7, PRIME MINISTER BARRE IN EFFECT LAUNCHED HIS OWN PARTICIPATION IN THE 1978 ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN. IN PRESENTING HIS PROGRAM, BARRE ATTEMPTED TO ACCOMPLISH THREE DIFFERENT OBJECTIVES: FIRST, TO BE RESPONSIVE TO THE PRESIDENT'S DESIRE FOR A GOVERNMENT PROGRAM TO DEAL WITH PROBLEMS AFFECTING FRENCH VOTERS AS OUTLINED IN HIS CARPENTRAS SPEECH LAST JULY; SECOND, TO EMPHASIZE HIS ROLE AS THE LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT DURING THE CAMPAIGN AND DEFEND THE INTEGRITY OF HIS POLICIES AND GOVERNMENT; AND THIRD, TO AVOID CONFLICT WITH THE PROGRAMS OF THE INDIVIDUAL POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE MAJORITY -- PARTICULARLY THE RPR. HE
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WAS RELATIVELY SUCCESSFUL. REACTIONS OF POLITICAL LEADERS WERE ALONG EXPECTED LINES. END SUMMARY.

1. THE THIRTY ACTION OBJECTIVES WERE DIVIDED INTO FOUR MAJOR CATEGORIES DETAILING APPROXIMATELY 100 PROPOSALS. THEY INCLUDE A WIDE VARIETY OF REFORMS IN JUDICIAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEEDINGS PROVIDING INCREAS-

ED PROTECTION FOR INDIVIDUALS AND INCLUDING THE INTRODUCTION OF THE PRINCIPLE OF HABEAS CORPUS. ECONOMIC PROPOSALS CENTER ON THE FIGHT AGAINST UNEMPLOYMENT (A SEEMING SHIFT AWAY FROM THE PRIMARY EMPHASIS ON CONTROLLING INFLATION) AND INCREASING BENEFITS TO LOW INCOME FAMILIES. OTHER PROPOSALS COVER SUCH PROBLEMS AS REFORMS IN FISCAL PROCEDURES, ENCOURAGEMENT OF SAVINGS AND INCENTIVES TO INVESTMENT, EDUCATIONAL REFORMS, IMPROVING STATUS OF WOMEN, AND SOME LIMITED MOVEMENT TOWARD INCREASING THE POWER OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL BODIES. PARTICULARLY NOTEWORTHY, HOWEVER, WAS BARRE'S PROPOSAL TO FREEZE CORPORATE TAXES, INCOME TAX, TVA AND SOCIAL SECURITY COSTS AT PRESENT LEVELS, AND TO REDUCE BY 50 PERCENT SOCIAL SECURITY COSTS ON EMPLOYEES FROM 18 TO 26 YEARS OLD FOR SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES, ALL FOR THE NEXT TWO YEARS. IN GENERAL, THE PROGRAM IS A STATEMENT OF RATHER LIMITED OBJECTIVES, EMPHASIZING REFORM IN RESPONSE TO PARTICULAR PROBLEMS WHILE MAINTAINING THE BASIC FISCAL CONSERVATISM AND POLICY ORIENTATIONS OF THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT. IF FULLY IMPLEMENTED (CONTINGENT UPON PROGRESS OF THE FRENCH ECONOMY), THE PROGRAM WOULD COST 22 BILLION FF IN 1982, 0.3 PERCENT OF TOTAL GOF EXPENSES, ACCORDING TO BARRE.

2. IN HIS SPEECH AND IN SUBSEQUENT COMMENTS, BARRE STRESSED HIS ROLE AS HEAD OF THE GOVERNMENT AND COMMITTED LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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HIMSELF TO AN ACTIVE ROLE IN THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN. HE EMPHASIZED THAT THE PROGRAM WAS THAT OF THE GOVERNMENT AS LED BY THE PRESIDENT AND THAT THIS PROGRAM WAS NOT IN COMPETITION WITH THE POLITICAL PLATFORMS OF INDIVIDUAL PARTIES. WHILE IMPLEMENTATION OF THIS PROGRAM WOULD HOPEFULLY REFLECT THE DESIRES OF THE INDIVIDUAL PARTIES IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY CONSTITUTING A MAJORITY, UNDER THE FIFTH REPUBLIC, IT IS THE PRESIDENT, NOT POLITICAL PARTIES, WHO DETERMINES THE POLICY OF THE GOVERNMENT, AND THESE PROPOSALS REPRESENTED WHAT THE PRESIDENT INTENDED TO ACCOMPLISH. AS SUCH, THEY WERE INTENDED TO BE

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REALISTIC, ATTAINABLE, AGREEABLE TO A MAJORITY OF THE
POLITICAL SPECTRUM, AND IN KEEPING WITH THE REALITIES OF
FRANCE'S ECONOMIC SITUATION. BARRE EMPHASIZED THE LIMITED
COST OF HIS PROPOSALS (PRIMARILY PROCEDURAL REFORMS)
AS OPPOSED TO THE EXPENDITURES INVOLVED IN THE LEFT'S
PROPOSALS WHICH HE STATED WERE TOTALLY UNREALISTIC GIVEN
THE PRESENT ECONOMIC SITUATION AND WHICH WOULD, IF IMPLEMENTED,
BANKRUPT FRANCE.

3. REACTIONS TO BARRE'S PROPOSALS PRODUCED NO BIG SURPRISES --
THMGMH THE RPR COULD HAVE BEEN HARSHER. THE RPR EXPRESSED
GENERAL SATISFACTION BUT STRESSED THAT THEY WOULD CONTINUE
TO WORK FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THEIR MORE AMBITIOUS PARTY
PROGRAM. THEY REPEATED THEIR CRITICISM THAT BARRE'S PROGRAMS
DID NOT GO FAR ENOUGH IN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ADDRESSING FRANCE'S MAIN ECONOMIC PROBLEM OF UNEMPLOYMENT.
CONCERNING BARRE'S INSISTENCE ON HIS ROLE AS THE HEAD OF THE
GOVERNMENT, THE RPR HAS NOTED ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS THAT THE
PROGRAM OF THE NEXT GOVERNMENT AND THE FUTURE OF MR. BARRE
WILL BE DETERMINED BY THE ELECTIONS IN MARCH. THE GISCARDIAN
CENTRIST PARTIES EXPRESSED THEIR SATISFACTION WITH THE
PROPOSALS AS A GOOD BASIS FOR FUTURE ACTION. THE MRG FELT
THAT THE GOVERN-

MENT SHOWED A DEFINITE LACK OF IMAGINATION AND THE SOCIALISTS SAID THAT IT WAS SIMPLY MORE OF THE SAME, REFLECTING AN INCREASED RELIANCE ON THE LIBERAL ECONOMIC MODELS OF THE AMERICANS AND WEST GERMANY.

4. COMMENT: BASICALLY, BARRE'S PRESENTATION DID NOT CHANGE MUCH AND ADDED LITTLE. ON THE ECONOMIC SIDE, DESPITE BARRE'S INCREASED EMPHASIS ON EMPLOYMENT, THE NEW PROPOSALS SEEM TO REPRESENT NO FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE. JUDGING FROM WHAT FEW NUMBERS HAVE BEEN GIVEN, THE ELECTORAL PROGRAM'S EMPHASIS IS LARGELY ON MEASURES THAT WOULD ADD LITTLE NET COST TO THE GOVERNMENT BUDGET OR TO CORPORATIONS. BARRE WOULD THUS RETAIN THE FLEXIBILITY TO PURSUE HIS EFFORTS TO BRING DOWN INFLATION AND ASSURE A HEALTHY CURRENT ACCOUNT. POLITICALLY, HIS SPEECH AND SPURT OF APPEARANCES BEFORE VARIOUS GROUPS OF JOURNALISTS PROVIDED MAXIMUM TIME IN THE SPOTLIGHT PRIOR TO BARRE'S DEPARTURE FOR CHINA, BUT DID LITTLE TO CLARIFY HIS STILL AMBIGUOUS ROLE IN THE CAMPAIGN. AS BARRE HAS REPEATEDLY STATED, HE IS THE AGENT OF THE PRESIDENT, A TECHNICIAN, NOT A POLITICAL PERSONALITY. HIS ROLE AS ARBITER IN THE ON-GOING MEETINGS OF NON-RPR MAJORITY PARTIES TO DECIDE ON SINGLE CANDIDATES TO OPPOSE THE RPR IN THE PRIMARIES HAS ALSO SERVED TO STRENGTHEN HIS ROLE AS THE PRESIDENT'S MAN. BUT TO THE EXTENT THAT HE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PUSHES HIS ACTION OBJECTIVES AS A PLATFORM OF GOVERNMENT AND TRIES TO COORDINATE THE MAJORITY CAMPAIGN, HE WILL INEVITABLY DRAW FIRE FROM CHIRAC. NONE OF THIS IS NEW, BUT THE PLATFORM OFFERS YET ANOTHER POSSIBLE HURDLE FOR THE MAJORITY TO SURMOUNT -- AT A TIME WHEN THE TWO MONTHS REMAINING BEFORE THE ELECTIONS DO NOT PERMIT IT TO STUMBLE TOO OFTEN.
HARTMAN

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